

**National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Grand Teton National Park
Wyoming**



Fuels Reduction Projects DECISION RECORD



The detailed record of the environmental assessment process and administrative record files are available for public review at the Grand Teton National Park Planning Office. For further information about this decision or the analysis process that led up to it, contact Suzy Schulman, Grand Teton National Park NEPA Coordinator and Environmental Planner, P.O. Box 170, Moose, Wyoming 83012, or telephone (307) 739-3467.

Decision

It is my decision to implement *Alternative 2 – Mechanical Fuels Treatment with Pile Burning* (proposed action), the preferred alternative as described in the Fuels Reduction Project Environmental Assessment (August 2003) for Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming.

The decision includes mechanically treating seven sites totaling 89 acres between Moran and Moose by creating shaded fuel breaks in mixed conifer fuels and increasing spacing by mowing sage fuels. The treatments will thin overstory trees to a distance of 12 feet between trees or groups of trees, reduce seedling and pole size tree densities, reduce accumulations of downed logs and debris, and remove limbs within 6 feet of the ground. Treatments will include a combination of cutting and piling of live vegetation, piling of dead vegetation, pile burning, broadcast burning, and fuel break mowing. Cut materials will be piled by hand and burned on site once they dry adequately. All treatments except the mowing will be conducted by hand crews using chain and handsaws to cut the debris into manageable lengths and will be focused near structures. The seven project locations are:

- ❑ McCollister – Fuels reduction work and clean up of dead and down fuels around historic residence and outbuildings to reduce fire threat. (10 Acres)
- ❑ Fabian Ranch – Fuels reduction work and clean up of dead and down fuels around historic structures. This also will be used for historic scene maintenance. (20 Acres)
- ❑ Blacktail North – Fuels reduction work and clean up of dead and down fuels along the park boundary adjacent to private properties to reduce fire threat. (6 Acres)
- ❑ Bar B C - Fuels reduction work and clean up of dead and down fuels around historic structures. This also will be used for historic scene maintenance. (20 Acres mowing, 10 Acres chainsaw work)
- ❑ Oxbow Housing (Jackson Lake Ranger Station) - Fuels reduction work and clean up of dead and down fuels around historic residence and outbuildings to reduce fire threat. (7 Acres)
- ❑ Moran - Fuels reduction work and clean up of dead and down fuels around residences and outbuildings to reduce fire threat. This project was begun as prescribed burn preparation, but due to sage grouse concerns we are only using mechanical treatments immediately adjacent to structures. (10 Acres)
- ❑ Jackson Lake Dam - Fuels reduction work and clean up of dead and down fuels around residence and outbuildings at the Bureau of Reclamation Administrative Site to reduce fire threat. (6 Acres)

The mitigation and monitoring effects set forth in this decision are designed to assure that conditions meet the objective, which is to reduce fuels accumulations in and adjacent to a number of historic structures, private residences, government offices, government housing units, and Bureau of Reclamation properties. The following mitigation measures will be implemented as part of this decision, and will be applicable to all fuels treatments throughout the life of the project:

- ❑ Conduct monitoring and evaluation of new growth to assess appropriate time and technique for the next treatment in order to minimize long-term follow-up and maintenance costs.
- ❑ Provide education and outreach both internally and externally on techniques and decision criteria to inform the public about the short-term visual impacts or aesthetics to anticipate. Help educate the public to change the perception that mechanical treatment is “unnatural.”
- ❑ Conduct pre-treatment inventories; monitor and treat as necessary non-native species to reduce the risk of spreading.
- ❑ Follow Special Operating Procedures (SOPs) regarding the cleaning of equipment and vehicles to reduce the spread of noxious and invasive species during operations.

- ❑ Follow standards and protocols and monitor wildlife for future prescription adjustments in order to minimize the potential effects to vegetation and wildlife by blow down, killing trees by limbing, disease, and burn piles scorching soils.
- ❑ Burn only under favorable atmospheric conditions, provide advanced notification to residents and visitors, allow fuels to cure completely to reduce smoke, sell firewood to reduce heavy fuels being burned, limit number of piles burned per day, or any combination thereof to minimize smoke impacts.
- ❑ Select specific times of the day and the week to use chainsaws and consider burning piles instead of chipping to minimize noise impacts on residents, visitors, and wildlife.
- ❑ Refine and utilize SOPs to ensure proper personnel training and supervision to reduce risk of injury to personnel during treatment operations.
- ❑ At Blacktail North, make a special effort to educate and inform private residents that additional land treatment (by them) will be required in order to fully meet the purpose and need of this action, since treatment is not immediately adjacent to their structures.

Decision Rationale

Fuels accumulations in and adjacent to a number of historic structures, private residences, government offices, government housing units, and Bureau of Reclamation properties must be reduced. Dead and down fuels must be thinned and removed to reduce the potential intensity of fires, allowing firefighters to safely and efficiently suppress fires. Implementation of the proposed action will reduce the risk of wildland fire to structures and the environment while providing for firefighter safety and reduce risk to human life and provide protection of property. The proposed action would provide maximum protection of park resources and values, human health and safety, and visitor use and enjoyment of Grand Teton National Park.

The proposed action is the environmentally preferred alternative. This action poses minor and relatively short-term effects to air quality, vegetation, and wildlife habitat, yet has the potential to moderately affect employee and public safety in a beneficial way. It poses negligible effects to cultural resources and Threatened & Endangered (T&E) species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's biological opinion dated September 22, 2003 concurs with our *"may effect, not likely to effect"* determination regarding T&E species and the likelihood of only negligible effects.

Adverse environmental impacts that could occur are minor and temporary in effect. There are no unmitigated adverse impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law. It has been determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the human environment as defined in 40 CFR §1508.27. Significance is determined by specific criteria which are outlined in the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The proposed action does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS).

Public Involvement

In response to National Fire Plan initiatives, Grand Teton National Park, Bridger-Teton National Forest, and Jackson/Teton County have repeatedly collaborated on fuels treatment projects in the Greater Jackson Hole area with large success. A public scoping workshop was conducted on April 24, 2003 in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to identify potential project-related issues. Representatives

from National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Forest Service, and Jackson/Teton County were present to answer questions and solicit comments on the project. A total of 13 individuals attended the workshop. One written comment was received during the public workshop and two comments were received by mail. In general, several verbal comments were received in support of reducing fuels in these seven project areas, in addition to other areas to be considered in the future. No public comments were received on the environmental assessment.

Impairment Determination

The National Park Service has determined that implementation of the proposed action will not constitute impairment to Grand Teton National Park's resources and values. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the Fuels Reduction Projects Environmental Assessment, the public comments received, relevant scientific studies, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker guided by the direction in *NPS Management Policies, 2001*. Although the project would have some adverse impacts, in all cases these adverse impacts would be the result of actions taken to preserve and restore other park resources and values. Overall, the proposed action would result in benefits to park resources and values, including opportunities for their enjoyment. It would not result in their impairment or in violation of the National Park Service Organic Act.

Responsible Officials

Recommended:	 Superintendent ACTH	<u>10/01/03</u> Date
Approved:	 Intermountain Regional Director	<u>10/2/03</u> Date